News Release
Communiqué

Ontario

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

Ministère de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée

For Immediate Release
August 16, 2007
2007/nr-165

MCGUINTY GOVERNMENT IMPROVING ACCESS TO TREATMENT FOR SEVERE OBESITY

Hamilton Health Sciences Named Second Centre Of Excellence For Bariatric Treatment

HAMILTON – The McGuinty government is bolstering support for Ontarians who are fighting severe obesity by providing $700,000 to add more bariatric outpatient services at the Hamilton Health Sciences bariatric clinic, Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman announced today.

"Keeping Ontarians healthy is a priority for our government," said Smitherman. "By expanding bariatric services in Hamilton, we can now provide a comprehensive continuum of care for Ontarians who need help managing severe weight problems."

The funding announced today will enable the hospital to increase access to pre and post-surgical care including diagnosis, counseling, weight loss treatment and referral so patients do not have to seek out-of-province care. Today's announcement includes:

- $510,000 in base funding in 2007/08 to increase the hospital's capacity to treat 500 additional patients per year. This is in addition to the 200 outpatient cases already seen at Hamilton Health Sciences
- $180,000 in capital funding to upgrade their facilities to increase their capacity for accommodating more patients.

The growth of this program will improve patient accessibility for preliminary assessment, and ongoing treatment of the morbidly obese, in an outpatient clinic setting. It has been designed to provide an integrated range of services that will work in conjunction with the bariatric surgical Centre of Excellence located at Humber River Regional Hospital to ensure a complementary care model that emphasizes both medical and surgical treatments. The expanded program will also help facilitate bariatric networks of care in Ontario, while improving wait times and the management of patients previously eligible for out-of-country treatment.

"Today's investment in bariatric surgery within our Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) at Hamilton Health Sciences is a testament to the expert work of our medical professionals," said Pat Mandy, CEO of the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant LHIN. "Throughout the course of their treatments, patients from our area will now benefit from care close to home."

"Today's investment in bariatric treatment at Hamilton Health Sciences is very exciting news for our patients and staff," said Murray Martin, President and CEO of Hamilton Health Sciences. "This funding will enable us to increase the number of patients we care for and to renovate and equip our bariatric clinic so it accommodates them more comfortably and effectively."

The Hamilton Health Science bariatric program has been in place since 2003 with an experienced team of medical internists, anesthetists, nurses, dieticians and social workers. The program builds on the commitment by patients to maintain their reduced weight following surgery.

"This announcement is welcome news for Hamilton," says Canadian Obesity Network Scientific Director and McMaster University Professor Dr. Arya M. Sharma. "Obesity is a complex and widespread disease that requires significant resources to address effectively, and I congratulate the Ministry on its decision to expand access to bariatric treatment for the many people in the region who will benefit from it."

"This is another positive step for the provision of comprehensive treatment helping those needing the services of this outstanding Bariatric Clinic." Said Ted McMeekin, MPP Ancaster Dundas Flamborough Aldershot.

This is just the latest example of how, working together, Ontarians have achieved results in reducing obesity. Other initiatives include:

- Investing over $3.8 million for 225 additional bariatric surgeries and related capital expansions at Humber River Regional Hospital and creating Ontario's first bariatric centre of excellence
- Launching EatRight Ontario telephone information service that provides healthy eating and nutrition advice to Ontarians. The toll-free EatRight Ontario telephone service enables individuals to ask Registered Dietitians nutrition questions by calling 1-877-510-510-2 or visiting www.ontario.ca/eatright
- Launching a $10 million Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL) Action Plan designed to encourage all Ontarians especially youth to live a healthy, active lives.

Today's initiative is part of the McGuinty government's plan for innovation in public health care, building a system that delivers on three priorities - keeping Ontarians healthy, reducing wait times and providing better access to doctors and nurses.

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